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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 004661

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IRAQ DONORS PLEDGES: AMBASSADOR PRESSES ITALIAN PRIME MINISTRY

REF: STATE 286648

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR MEL SEMBLER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B)(D)

¶1. (C) AMBASSADOR SEMBLER MET WITH PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI'S CLOSEST ADVISOR, UNDERSECRETARY IN THE PM'S OFFICE GIANNI LETTA, FOR 30 MINUTES ON OCTOBER 9 TO URGE -- IN THE STRONGEST TERMS -- THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT MAKE THE MOST GENEROUS PLEDGE POSSIBLE AT THE UPCOMING MADRID DONORS' CONFERENCE. THE AMBASSADOR (ACCOMPANIED BY DCM AND ECMIN), TOLD LETTA THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WAS LOOKING TO ITALY ONCE AGAIN FOR LEADERSHIP, JUST AS ITALY HAS LED SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST. NOTING THAT IRAQ'S NEEDS HAVE BEEN ASSESSED AT \$55 BILLION (COMBINED WORLD BANK/IMF/UN AND CPA ESTIMATES), THE AMBASSADOR SAID IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT, NOT JUST THE EU AS A WHOLE, BUT EVERY INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATE, MAKE THE MOST GENEROUS PLEDGE. BEYOND A HARD COMMITMENT FOR 2004, WE NEEDED INDICATIVE PLEDGES FOR 2005-7.

IRAQ IS A CRITICAL COUNTRY, THE AMBASSADOR STRESSED, WHOSE RECONSTRUCTION AND STABILITY IS EVERY BIT AS ESSENTIAL TO EUROPE AS TO THE U.S.

¶2. (C) LETTA RESPONDED THAT THE AMBASSADOR'S MESSAGE -- AND THE HIGH IMPORTANCE OF THE MADRID CONFERENCE TO THE UNITES STATES -- WAS CRYSTAL CLEAR AND VERY WELL TIMED. THE CONFERENCE HAD OF COURSE BEEN DISCUSSED WITHIN THE GOI, BUT NO FIRM DECISIONS HAD BEEN TAKEN. A CABINET LEVEL MEETING WOULD CONSIDER THE MATTER THE FOLLOWING DAY (FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10), AND LETTA PROMISED TO CONVEY THE UNITED STATES' VIEWS DIRECTLY TO PM BERLUSCONI IN ADVANCE OF THAT MEETING.

¶3. (C) THE AMBASSADOR THANKED LETTA. IN CONCLUDING, HE RECALLED THAT PRESIDENT BUSH HAD TOLD PM BERLUSCONI AT CRAWFORD THAT, DESPITE THE UNITED STATES' OWN BUDGETARY DIFFICULTIES, WE WOULD PRESS FORWARD WITH A MAJOR FINANCIAL COMMITMENT TO IRAQ. WE HOPED THAT ITALY WOULD DO THE SAME.

¶4. (C) IN SEPARATE MEETINGS, ECMIN ALSO RAISED REFTEL DEMARCHE AND AMB'S MEETING WITH LETTA, WITH MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE MIDDLE EAST RICARDO SESSA AND DG FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS GIANDOMENICO MAGLIANO. SESSA NOTED THAT SECRETARY POWELL AND FM FRATTINI HAD DISCUSSED THE MADRID CONFERENCE IN THEIR OCTOBER 9 PHONE CALL. SESSA DESCRIBE THE US AND ITALY AS "ON THE SAME PAGE." THE MFA WOULD NOW HAVE TO SEE HOW MUCH MONEY IT COULD GET OUT OF THE ITALIAN FINANCE MINISTRY. MAGLIANO SAID THAT HIS DIRECTORATE WAS FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR MEETINGS IN MADRID, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS A VERY POSITIVE STEP FORWARD, EVEN IF HE WISHED THAT MEETING COULD BE LARGER AND INCLUDE MORE COMPANIES. MAGLIANO STRESSED THAT PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT WAS CRITICAL NOT ONLY FOR THE LONGER TERM DEVELOPMENT OF IRAQ, BUT BECAUSE THE PROSPECT OF "COMMERCIAL PAYBACK" DOWN THE ROAD WOULD MAKE IT POLITICALLY EASIER FOR GOVERNMENTS TO EXPLAIN LARGE DONATIONS IN MADRID TO DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCIES.

SEMBLER

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